



Equality between men and women was a core tenet enshrined in the UN Charter in 1945. Yet, 75 years later, women and girls live in a world of widespread gender inequality. Turning this around is a priority of the UN in 2020 which also marks the [25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#); the 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security; and the 5th anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda is clear: Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a goal in itself (Sustainable Development Goal 5) as well as a catalyst for the achievement of all the other goals. Ultimately, development will only be sustainable if its benefits accrue equally to both women and men. The world has a decade left to turn this [promise into action](#).

The past decades have seen important progress for women and girls. Overall, however, change has been uneven and incremental. At the current rate of change, the global gender gap will not close for another [100 years](#). As the Secretary-General [warned](#), “change is coming at a pace that is too slow for the women and girls whose lives depend on it”. Over the next 10 years, the global community must act with urgency and determination to accelerate progress and achieve gender equality for all women and girls everywhere.

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## ENDING DISCRIMINATION IN LAW AND PRACTICE

Although it is 40 years since the adoption of the Convention on all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), discrimination remains commonplace in law and practice. On one hand, 131 countries have **added** 274 gender-related reforms to laws and regulations over the past decade, however it is **estimated** that more than 2.5 billion women and girls live in countries with at least one discriminatory law on the books. These statutes restrict women’s ability to make decisions about marriage, divorce, and child custody; and to make choices about **getting a job or starting a business**, among others.

Meanwhile, violence against women remains a human rights abuse on a massive scale. One in five women globally has experienced sexual and/or physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner in the past year. While in the 1990s, laws against domestic violence were uncommon, today they are in place in around three quarters of countries. This is important progress, largely driven by **feminist activism**, although much more needs to be done to ensure implementation, and to provide services and access to justice for survivors.

### ➤ ENVISIONING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY WITH GENDER EQUALITY AT ITS CORE

Current economic models have failed to generate progress and prosperity for all. The economic opportunity gap **widened** this year compared to last year, following an overall stall from 2006-2020 (although, it is still better than 14 years ago). As a result, the promise of economic empowerment remains unfulfilled for the majority of the world's women. Globally, the gender gap in labour force participation among adults (25-54) has stagnated over the past 20 years. Less than two thirds of women (62 per cent) are in the labour force, compared to 93 per cent of men.

Of those women who are employed, 58 per cent are in the informal economy earning low wages and lacking social protection. Unpaid care and domestic work remain stubbornly feminized compromising women's ability to earn an income and build up assets for their later life. This work **sustains families** and economies. Yet, it remains largely invisible and poorly supported. The **climate crisis** brings into focus the need for alternative development pathways. Scaling up investments in the care economy and ensuring that women benefit from new green jobs is critical for such pathways to succeed. In addition, it is an untapped benefit to the world economy: **estimates** show that closing the gender gap could increase global GDP by 35 per cent on average.

Furthermore, although financial inclusion is on the rise globally, a gender gap **persists**: 80 per cent of women-owned businesses with credit needs are underserved, and women in developing countries are **nine per cent less likely** than men to have a bank account. Women's equal access to financial services not only unlocks economic potential, but also gives women a say in their own financial decisions.

### ➤ ERADICATING POVERTY THROUGH GENDER-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION AND PUBLIC SERVICES

While extreme poverty has declined dramatically between 1990 and 2015, across regions, poverty remains gendered. Globally, women aged 25-34 globally are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. Most of these women lack access to social protection and public services that would provide them with sustainable routes out of poverty.

Despite progress in girls' education, nearly half a billion women and girls aged 15 years and over are illiterate and just **39 per cent** of rural girls attend secondary school. However, **estimates** show that based on current trends, the educational attainment gender gap can be fully closed in 12 years, in large part due to advancements in some developing countries. Increasing women's access to education has been shown to increase women's labor force participation **rates**; **delay** marriage and having children; and leaves women less vulnerable to violence.

Thanks to better access to maternity care, fewer women die in childbirth today compared to 20 years ago. Yet, women's sexual and reproductive rights remain far from realized. In 2019, 190 million women of reproductive age worldwide who wanted to avoid pregnancy did not use any contraceptive method, an increase from 156 million in 2000. Boosting investments in gender-responsive **social protection** and public services, such as health and education, is critical to closing these gaps.

### ➤ CLOSING THE LEADERSHIP GAP AND UNLEASHING THE POWER OF WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION

Power and decision-making remain overwhelmingly dominated by men. Women's representation in parliaments has more than doubled from 11 per cent in 1995, but men still hold three quarters of seats. Men also hold 73 per cent of management positions and are 70 per cent of climate negotiators. In peace negotiations, the numbers are even more dismal. In spite of conclusive evidence that where women are engaged in formal peace processes, **agreements are more inclusive and durable**, women make up just 13 per cent of peace negotiators and 4 per cent of signatories.

Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America have made the most yearly progress in **reducing** the political empowerment gap this since 2012, whereas the gap in East Asia and the Pacific

is regressing. If we continue at the current pace, by 2030 **nearly 2 billion (roughly half of) women and girls** will still face discrimination in opportunities for public leadership.

While access to formal decision-making remains limited, women are claiming space and taking on leadership roles not only in feminist organizations, but in a range of movements for social justice, making the connections between gender equality, climate justice, workers' rights, racial equality and more. Women human rights defenders and activists face smear campaigns, physical attacks, harassment and intimidation. Funding for their work is often scarce. And yet, new generations of young feminists continue to bring energy and innovative strategies to the struggle for women's rights.

### ➤ LOOKING FORWARD

Gender equality remains unfinished business in every country of the world. Women and girls have less access to education and healthcare, too often lack economic autonomy and are under-represented in decision-making at all levels. The progress that has been made towards gender equality over the past quarter of a century, though slow and incremental, does however show that change is possible.

Legal reform, strengthening gender-responsive social protection and public service delivery, quotas for women's representation, and support for women's movements are all strategies that have made a difference and should be scaled up. In the UN Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, governments, the UN, civil society, and the private sector, working together, have the potential to transform the lives of women and girls, for the benefit of all.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION



- [Sustainable Development Goal 5 | Achieve Gender Equity and Empower All Women and Girls](#)
- [UN Women](#)
- [UN Women | Women's Rights in Review 25 Years after Beijing](#)
- [Report of the Secretary-General | Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(Beijing+25\)](#)
- [UN Women | The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)
- [World Bank | Women, Business, and the Law Report 2020](#)